

Inspection of Arena Academy

Beeches Road, Birmingham, West Midlands B42 2PY

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 June 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils at Arena Academy enjoy school and want to do well. Staff have warm relationships with pupils and take time to get to know their likes and interests. The school's core values of collaboration, opportunity, respect and excellence sit at the centre of leaders' work to improve the school.

In lessons and at social times, pupils generally behave appropriately. Many pupils enjoy playing games or sitting together at break and lunchtimes. However, some staff do not apply the school's behaviour policy consistently. Not all pupils, parents and carers have confidence in some staff to tackle incidents of bullying swiftly.

In recent years, leaders have strengthened the school curriculum. This has led to greater clarity as to the order in which topics are taught to help pupils make better progress. However, there remains some variability in how the curriculum is taught and how teachers check pupils' understanding.

Many pupils enjoy and participate in a range of extra-curricular opportunities. This includes digital leadership, music, weight training and Gaelic football. Several pupils are also part of the school's Combined Cadet Force.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has undergone a significant period of turbulence since becoming a new academy. Trust leaders have provided stability and halted a decline in standards. The new headteacher, alongside other school leaders, has worked quickly to improve the curriculum and other key areas of the school's work. However, there is still further work to do for the school to improve.

In many subjects, the curriculum is ambitious, well planned and structured. Leaders have spent time carefully considering the order in which topics are taught. Subject 'learning journeys' set out how pupils build knowledge and understanding sequentially and make connections in their learning. This is particularly successful in art and design. Leaders ensure that pupils build the foundational knowledge and skills in Year 7 so that they can access more-complex aspects of art in future topics. As a result, pupils make strong progress in this subject.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge and present ideas in a clear and logical way. At the beginning of lessons, teachers provide time for pupils to recall prior learning. In some lessons, 'do now tasks' are not always focused on the key knowledge that pupils need to remember. This does not help pupils secure their understanding of key ideas or concepts. Teachers use questioning reasonably well during lessons to check understanding. However, some other checks on learning do not help to identify errors and misconceptions quickly. Additionally, some pupils struggle to know what they do well and where they need to improve.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are provided with effective support. Leaders have clear systems in place to identify pupils' needs. They ensure that teachers adapt tasks appropriately so pupils can access the full curriculum. Leaders ensure that learning plans for pupils with SEND are regularly reviewed so that targets are accurate and up to date.

Leaders have looked to strengthen reading across the school. Pupils in key stage 3 have access to an online reading programme that tracks the amount pupils read and their comprehension skills. Leaders monitor this closely and provide reward points to pupils for the books they read. All pupils are assessed in Year 7 to identify those who may still be struggling to read. While some interventions take place with the weakest readers, leaders recognise this could improve further. They have plans in place for this to happen.

Leaders have put in place a clear programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE). This is delivered through form time sessions and 'drop down days' throughout the year. Pupils learn about topics such as consent and different types of relationships. However, not all pupils see the value of PSHE lessons. Furthermore, there is variability in the quality of how these lessons are delivered by teachers.

The school's careers programme is strong. Leaders ensure that pupils have access to external organisations so that they are aware of the various pathways available to them when they leave school. There are clear expectations as to what each year group does in relation to careers education, including work experience for Year 10. Pupils appreciate the many ways they learn about work and feel well prepared for their next steps in education or training.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have clear systems and processes in place for identifying pupils at risk of harm or abuse. Staff are clear what they should do if they have a concern about a child and where this needs to be recorded. Leaders ensure that staff receive annual training and regular safeguarding updates. Safeguarding logs are well managed and show that leaders act in a timely way to ensure pupils get the help and support they need. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the PSHE curriculum on topics such as harmful sexual behaviour and staying safe online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not assess pupils' learning consistently well. This means that some teachers do not address errors and misconceptions quickly. In addition, some pupils are not clear about what they do well and where they need to improve.

Leaders should ensure that teachers use assessment effectively to help embed knowledge and that pupils have a secure understanding of their progress.

- Leaders have not yet implemented a rigorous and sequential approach to support those pupils who struggle to read. This means that some pupils do not get the precise help and support they need to catch up with their peers. Leaders should continue with their current plans to implement an effective system to help support the weakest readers.
- Some pupils do not behave consistently well during unstructured time. Furthermore, some pupils and parents do not always have confidence in leaders to tackle incidents of bullying. Leaders should take steps to ensure teachers apply the behaviour policy consistently. Leaders should ensure that pupils feel confident to report incidents of bullying and that they will be dealt with effectively.
- Leaders are not fully checking and evaluating some aspects of their work. This means that there remains variability in the quality of some areas, including the delivery of the PSHE curriculum and behaviour. Leaders should ensure that they carefully monitor and evaluate all aspects of their work so that they can help the school to progress and move forward.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	145580
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10227758
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,043
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Tom Gibbins
Headteacher	Raj Mann
Website	https://corearena.academy
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of the CORE Education Trust. The school joined the trust in March 2018.
- A new headteacher was appointed in April 2020.
- The school uses seven registered alternative provisions.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils in Years 8 to 11 receive information about the full range of education and training options open to them. This includes opportunities for a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

- Inspectors focused on the following subjects: English, mathematics, geography, modern foreign languages, and art and design. Inspectors examined leaders' plans, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils about the way these subjects are taught. They also looked at other subjects to check how they are planned and taught.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents. These included information about behaviour, attendance, the school curriculum, and improvement planning. The school website was also checked.
- Inspectors talked to staff and leaders about safeguarding arrangements. They examined how leaders make employment checks on staff and scrutinised further safeguarding records. They also asked how incidents reported by pupils are recorded and analysed.
- Inspectors observed informal times of the day to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors held meetings with members of the trust and governors, the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally to pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Mark Howes, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mike Onyon	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Wakefield	Ofsted Inspector
Hannah Stoten	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jane Spilsbury	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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